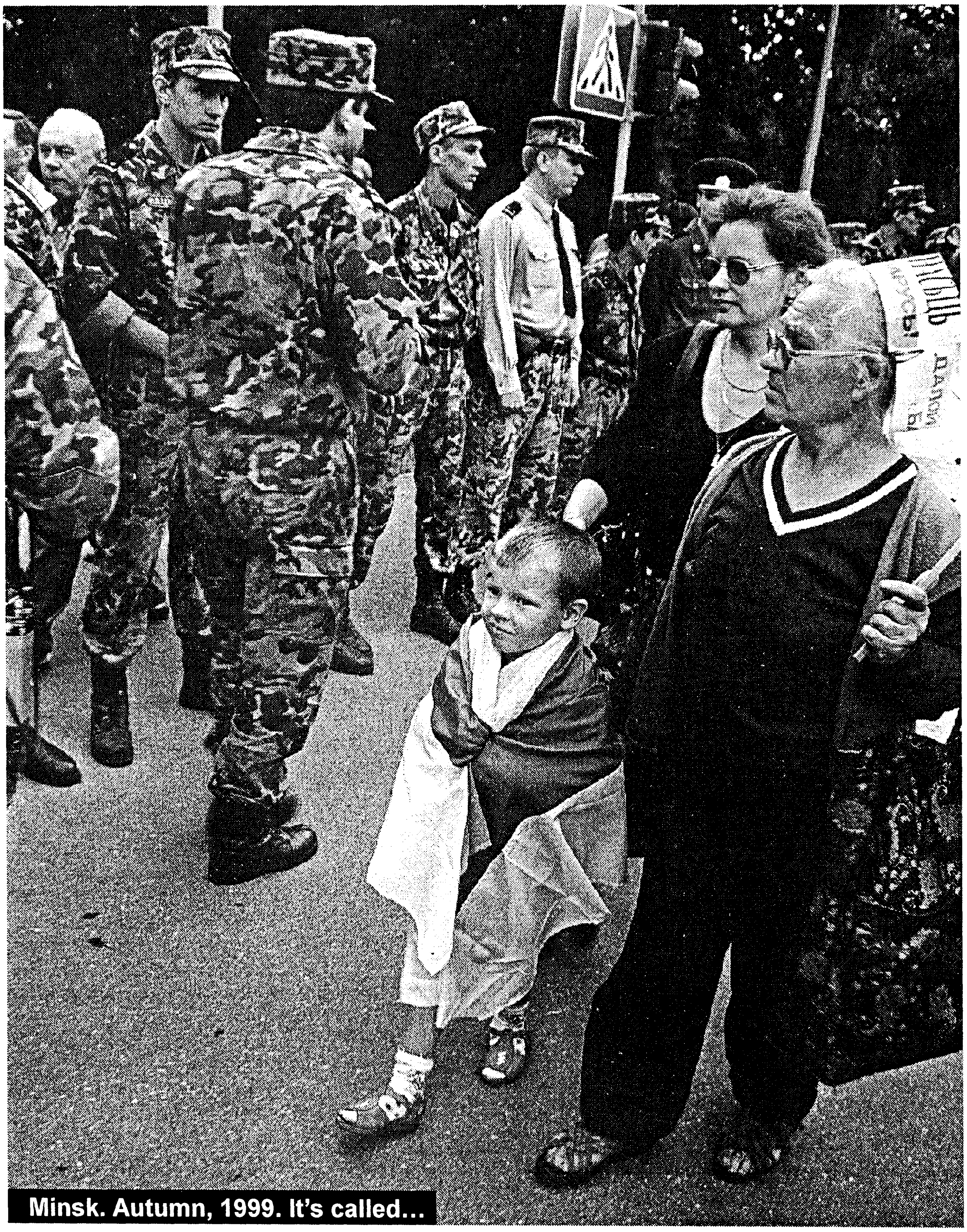
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The Right to Freedom

The Bulletin of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96"



Minsk. Autumn, 1999. It's called...

MASS MEDIA UNDER PRESSURE

The title "Mass media under pressure" is not new and sounds like an old journalist stamp. But what can one do if our entire life smells like an old Bolshevik naphthalene? We have studied it before, if not on the lessons of the history of the USSR, then on the lessons of the history of the communist party. We read about this in the Soviet newspapers when they were writing about the decay of capitalism. But we have, as it should be, our own peculiarities: the opposition uses new methods - the authorities use new methods too.

Once studying the history of Bolshevik press we were sincerely amazed by the ingenuity of the Leninists who edited "Put' Pravdy", then "Golos Pravdy", "Delo Pravdy", etc. instead of the forbidden "Pravda" as a way of fighting with Tsar secret police...

No one could imagine that

(to be continued on p. 2)

CHRONICLE

On 27 September, an administrative case instituted against Aleg Trusaw, chairman of the Association of the Belarusan language named after Frantsishak Skaryna, was considered on the fourth court sitting in Minsk's Savetski district court. He has been charged with participation in unauthorised rally devoted to the Independence Day on 27 July. Judge I.Sheika headed the first three court sittings. The witnesses of A.Trusaw were interrogated during those court sittings and videotape of events, which took place on 27 September, and proved that A.Trusaw didn't take part in the aforementioned rally, was seen. Different judge headed the fourth court sitting. This time it was a judge R.Kazadaew who didn't start consideration of the case from the very beginning. By doing so he beyond all question broke the law. As usual militiamen were the only witnesses on the trial. Barys Gyunter, representative of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96», was a public defender of A.Trusaw on the trial. The lawyer of A.Trusaw proved his client's innocence and gave evidences saying that A.Trusaw being a reporter of the newspaper «Nasha Slova» and a member of its editorial board merely observed the rally from the street on that day. In spite of that judge warned A.Trusaw.

On 30 September, the actions of protest organised by independent trade unions were held in the biggest cities of Belarus. Fifteen thousand people unsatisfied with the state of things in the country took part in a meeting held in Bangalor Square, Minsk. The action took place in spite of counteractions from authorities part.

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ATTFCK ON INDEPENDENT PRESS

THE STATEMENT OF JAMES RUBIN, THE PRESS SECRETARY OF THE US STATE DEPARTMENT

The United States of America consider the growing pressure on the independent press in Belarus to be an escalation of the efforts directed on the suppression of the freedom of speech, as well as the violation by Belarus of its' duties in accordance with the documents of OSCE and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966).

In the past two weeks Belarusan authorities closed nine opposition newspapers and magazines. The State Com-mittee on Press made a de-cision that cancels the licenses of nine newspapers. The rea-son for such a decision is that these newspapers can't show the documents proving the existence of the address. This decision closed "Nasha Svaboda" (the successor of the newspaper "Naviny"), "Kur'er Navagrudski" and other newspapers. One more newspaper is under the threat of closing because of violation of the tax legislation. These actions are the continuation of the campaign of pressure on other independent media, non-governmental organisations and opposition, that was started by the authorities and during which people were arrested and disappeared.

The United States of America call Belarus to stop repression against independent press and keep the responsibilities the country took while becoming member of the Organisation on security and Cooperation in Europe and signing the International Covenant on Civic and Political Rights. Moreover the United States call Belarus to renew the same democratic changes as the ones that take place in the neighbouring countries.

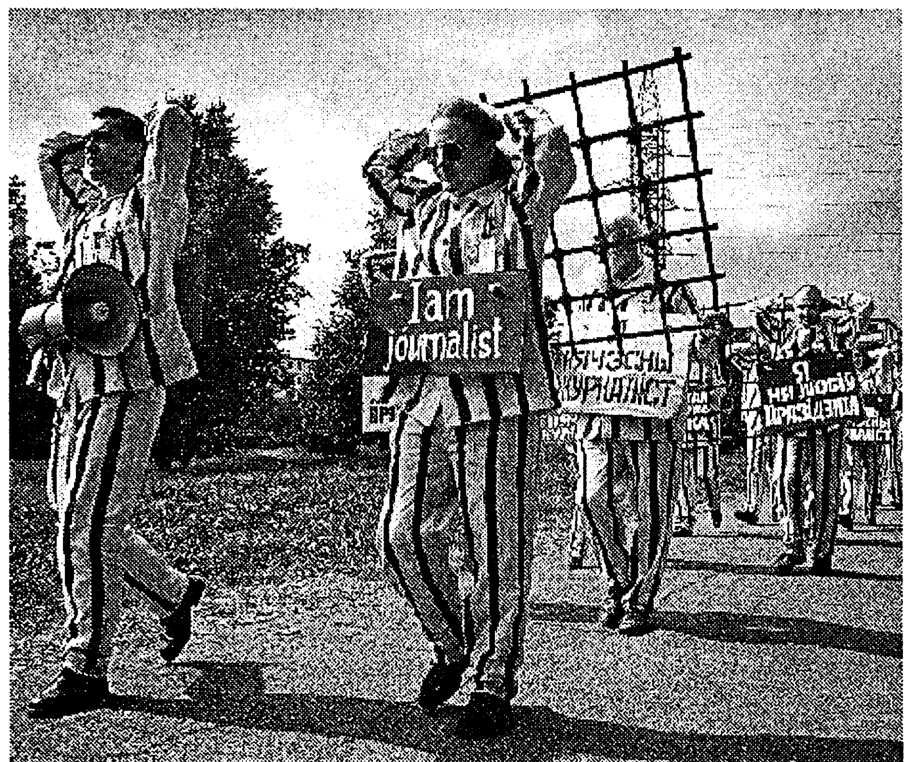
MASS MEDIA UNDER PRESSURE

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Bolshevik experience would be used in Belarus.

When the first opposition newspaper "Svaboda" faced the threat of closing the readers and subscribers of the paper were told that they would receive the newspaper "Naviny" instead. When "Naviny" received two warnings from the State Committee on Press the editorial office announced the newspaper "Nasha Svaboda" to be their successor.

We wrote about the actions of the authorities against the newspaper "Naviny" in our previous issue "The Right to freedom". "Niviny" was closed. But "Nasha Svaboda" was not published. And probably will never be published. The authorities found a smart answer on the ingenuity of opposition. The State Committee on Press found the registration certificate of the newspaper "Nasha Svaboda" invalid. At the same time it cancelled the registration of the eight independent newspapers. The reason for this was the selective (please notice this) check-up of the registration documents of these newspapers. The check-up showed that the registration of several newspapers had no co-ordination of the residence of the papers with the executive organs of the districts they were registered in. What does this mean? One of the members of the Committee explained that the co-ordination of the residence of the editorial office, founder and distributor of the paper with the executive committee of the corresponding district should be given with the application for registration. Earlier the Committee didn't demand this document from the newspapers that were registered in Minsk. But they remembered this point in connection with "Nasha Svaboda". Eight newspapers were also closed. The first issue of the magazine "Kur'er" was not published, the weekly newspaper of the news agency Belapan "Belorusskije Novosti" was never printed. It's evident that these papers faced these problems because of "Nasha Svaboda". The authorities decided to be pluralists and to close several papers. Please mind that only independent papers were chosen for the selective check-up, though the rules are the same for everyone.



Last year's march of protest held by independent journalits

The independent observers and journalists connect the quick actions of the authorities against "Naviny" and "Svaboda" with the march of freedom that is planned on 17 October. One can understand the role of the opposition newspapers in informing people about the place and time of action and in making an appeal on the citizens to take part in the march since the opposition has no access to the state controlled media. In fact the independent media are the only sources of true information about the state the country is in. Pro-government newspapers report about great achievements in economy, the growth of people' s income and about the opposition that wants to put these achievements in a bad light using the money given to them by the West and Russia. People who see the opposite of what is written in the state papers don't know what to think. One should keep in mind that the Soviet person is more used to believe in what is written in the papers than in what he sees in reality. That is why Lukashenka started his war against the independent press from the first days of his presidency. His first steps were to appoint his own people on the managing positions in major state television and radio stations and newspapers, and the closing of the independent newspapers. This war continues till this day. The Minsk newspaper "Belaruskaya Maladziozhnaya" as well as the Grodna newspaper "Pagonja" is facing the threat of closing. Let's not name the other newspapers in order not to try destiny. Even two of the most respectable newspapers "Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta" and "Belorusskaya Gazeta" felt the threat.

The journalists of "Naviny" ("Nasha Svaboda") are not planning on working for other newspapers. Right now the paper is published on Internet. The possibility of underground publishing is not excluded. The registration of the new newspaper can officially take from one to six months, but longer is expected. The situation of the other eight closed newspapers is very difficult as well. They were closed and it is unlikely that they will be quickly registered again.

The state that puts the opposition media in the underground can not be democratic. That is self-evident.

Andrei NALIVA

Human rights defenders – defenceless...

Against the illegality of the Belarusan authorities.

On 4 October militiamen, partly plain-clothed, burst into the flat on Kiseleva street which was the headquarters of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96". It happened during the meeting of the members of the centre with the parents of the children who died on Nyamiga the 30th of May. The parents came here to meet the journalists who write a documentary book describing what happened on Nyamiga that day.

I will describe the events on Kiseleva Street as a witness. We had made long preparations for the meeting with the parents of the children who died on Nyamiga. This meeting was very important for us, the members of the centre "Viasna-96" who started work on the book describing this tragedy just several days after the event.

There are different opinions about the events of the 30th of May. Many people just say that people wouldn't have died if they hadn't gone to drink free beer. Very often people don't want to see the evident, especially if it's not affecting them personally.

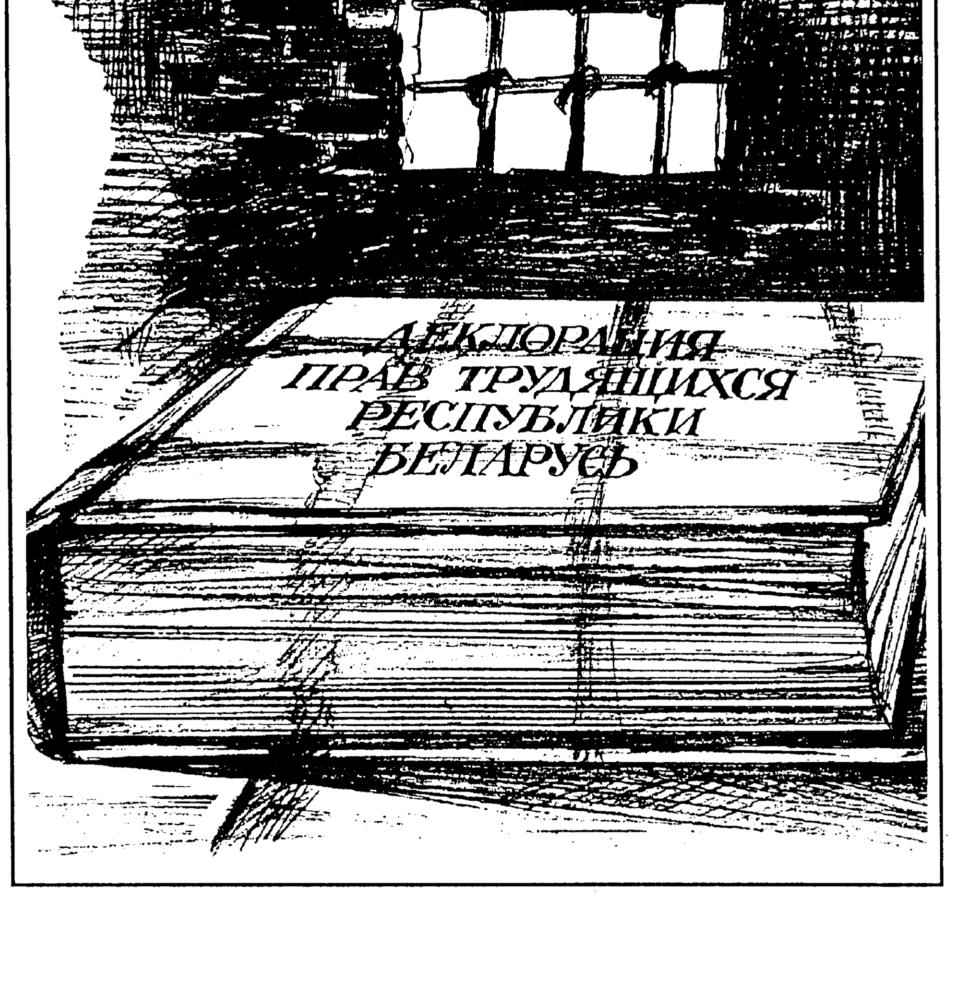
Enough time has passed since the tragedy, but many questions are still not answered. The investigation is not closed; the authorities refuse to commemorate the victims. The chief architect of the city of Minsk, Alexander Chadovich, said in a talk with the journalist Natallya Radzina ("Naviny", 10.08. 1999) that he didn't understand why strangers should remember the names of the deceased, since it is a personal thing. What happened here? It was a wild, sad accident. It should be forgotten as soon as possible and most of all it should be forgotten by the relatives. If we put a memorial plaque with the names, what would these names mean to strangers? Sasha, Olga, Lena...

It seems that to commemorate the victims of the tragedy to the authorities means taking responsibility for the death of these young people.

The documentary book about Nyamiga should tell the truth about the events of the 30th of May and commemorate the victims. That is why the journalists and the parents gathered on the 4th of October to discuss the project of the book. Georgii Vasilevitch Filonchik, whose granddaughter Marina Bibila, a student of the Belarus State University, died on Nyamiga, said: "It would be very good if the book would be published. The children that died were defenceless while living and are defenceless after they died. They were talented people, people of the XXI century, but they hadn't realised their abilities".

This is what we were talking about on the 4th of October. And then all of a sudden we heard the doorbell. I went to open the door. Through the peephole I saw a young man in a short-sleeve T-shirt. I opened the door and all of a sudden several militiamen appeared from both sides. They burst in to the flat. This reminded me of the capture of dangerous terrorists. They were shouting: "Are you printing leaflets? Whose flat is this? Show your documents!"

It should be mentioned that these were the employees of the militia department of the Central Administration of Internal Affairs, the region Nyamiga tragedy took place. The parents of the victims of the tragedy asked them: "Where have you been while our children were dying?" One of the militiamen said he had the day off, another said that his children didn't go there, that was why they were still alive. Not all parents agreed to show their documents. They said they were doing nothing illegal. The militiamen suggested they might be preparing a bomb. At last one of the militiamen explained that they came because of a telephone call they received from inhabitants of the house on Kiseleva Street. People phoned and said that there are people gathering in one flat, maybe terrorists. The militiamen explained their watchfulness by the events that happened in the neighbouring Russia. In connection with this the militiamen interrogated not only the journalists, authors of the new book, but also the parents, even the parents of the doctor Ala Melnikova who died on Nyamiga while saving other peoples lives. The parents of the young female doctor (who worked in the hospital of Internal Troops) stayed in the flat during the search that was carried out by the militiamen. The man in short-sleeve T-shirt tried to get the cassette from my Dictaphone and was all the time trying to open the door of the room where I talked with the parents. On my question who he was the policeman answered that he was a trainee of the militia force. The trainee all the time tried to open the wardrobe, to check files on the computer, etc. The mother of the doctor advised me not to pay any attention to them, as this is our reality.



The search lasted from six till ten in the evening. During the search more plain-clothed militiamen showed up, they refused to give their names, but one was recognised as Mikhail Udovik, the first deputy minister of Internal Affairs. The search ended with the confiscation of two computers, two printers, a scanner, a copying-machine, a modem and all issues of "The Right to Freedom" in three languages. One plain-clothed militiaman recorded everything on video.

It should be mentioned that the confiscated equipment is the property of the United States, which was rented by the centre "Viasna-96". The equipment was not returned after the complaint of the chairman of the centre "Viasna-96" to the prosecutor's office of the central district of Minsk, it was not returned even after the demand of the American Embassy to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to return the equipment. The equipment is kept for further examination.

The events of the 4th of October are one more sign of the pressure put on the human rights movement by the authorities. These events are connected with the negotiations between the authorities and the opposition. The chairman of the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96" Ales Byalatski is the head of the examination group on human rights. The computers contain files with information about political prisoners in Belarus and cases of violation of human rights in Belarus.

Palina STSEPANENKA

ONE LAW FOR THE RICH AND ANOTHER FOR THE POOR

WILFULNESS AND PETTY TYRANNY OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES REIGN IN BELARUSAN PROVINCE. THEY ENJOY FAMILIARITY AND IMPUNITY AND EVERYTHING IS ALLOWED FOR THEM...

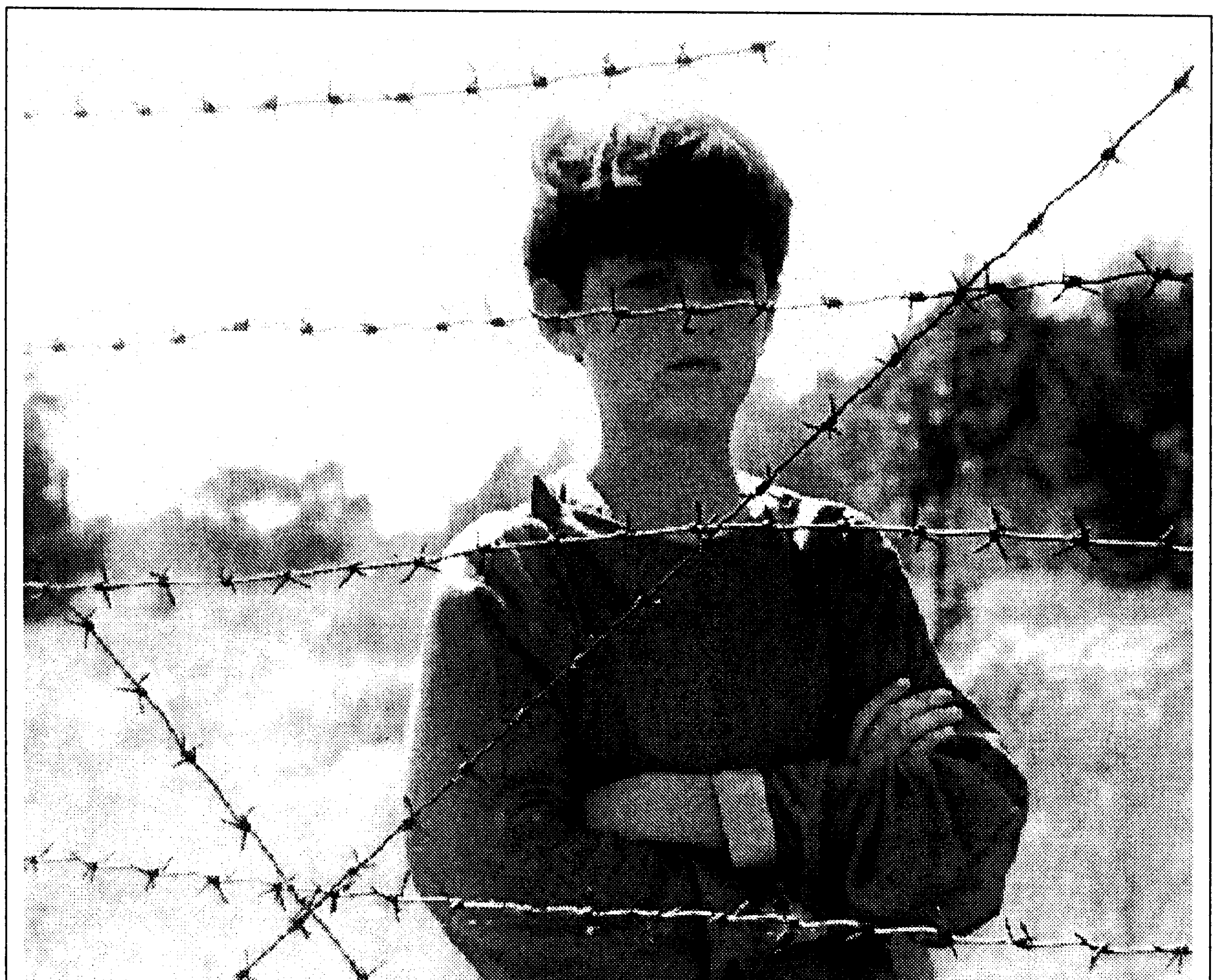
Yuri Gill who applied to the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96" for help told this story. What happened to him once more proved the fact that our country is still far from being one where the law rules, where the rights of each citizen are preserved, where the state protects a man from the self-will of its representatives. This case clearly showed an attitude of the Belarusan authorities towards Belarusan culture and its bearers.

Yuri Pyatrovich Gill has lived in Vilnius where he heads a Vilnius region's branch of the Association of the Belarusan language named after Frantsishak Skaryna. Apart from that Yuri Gill is a deputy to "valdiba" – organ of local self-ruling of Vilnius district. An occurrence that happened to Yuri Gill on Belarus' territory brought him to the Human Rights Centre "Viasna-96".

The point is that Yuri Gill inherited his parents' house based in a village Vashunava, Dokshytsy district, Vitsebsk region, Belarus. In this small house he with his friends set up a museum of history and ethnography named "Zastsyankovaya khatka". This museum became a structural unit of the Association of the Belarusan language. Folk feasts were held in this museum. People who are interested in the historical heritage of their land from different parts of Belarus as well as those from abroad gathered there and joined these holidays. Belarusan folk groups both from Belarus and from Vilnius region were invited to sing Belarusan folk songs there. People sang folk songs, did folk dances and celebrated folk feasts according to old, and sometimes forgotten, Belarusan traditions.

It should be mentioned that Yuri Gill himself collected all the exhibits of the aforementioned museum. He was the only person responsible for it and the only one who took care of it. Local authorities seemed must be glad at that. But it was not so. Leadership of a local collective farm and the local militia didn't like Yuri Gill's educational and cultural activities. What for Belarusan peasants should know their roots, rebirth old traditions that were buried together with their bearers – our grandpas and grandmas? Let peasants become drunkard and work for collective farms getting their wretched wages. It would be easier then to govern them, easier to intimidate and keep them submissive.

Different kinds of provocation began against the museum. They began to intimidate Mr. Gill. One of the reasons of such dislike for Mr. Gill and his museum was a neighbouring house, which belonged to one of the local superiors. Representatives of local presidential "vertical" used to gather in this house: chairman of a local collective farm and others. It comes without saying that "red feudal lords" didn't want any eyewitnesses of what they were doing.



So, this year, on 28 September, Yuri Gill was coming home while a car of a chairman of the local collective farm called "Chyrvony stsyag" (red flag) caught up with him. Two people went out of the car. Yuri Gill recognised both of them. They were chairman of the collective farm Giryn and new young chief agronomist whose family name Yuri Gill didn't know yet. They attacked Mr. Gill with coarse and unprintable words "You, Lithuanian mug, fascist are not any more allowed to come here! We will kill you!.." and began beating him in the middle of the street. Attacked people tried to drag Yuri Gill into a car but failed. Yuri Pyatrovich was able to break out from them and escape. He closed himself in his house-museum. There was a night watchman, neighbour of Yuri Gill pensioner Antos' Mekhavich, in the house-museum at that time. Yuri Gill told him what had happened to him. Some minutes after they heard knocking at the museum's door and outcry "Open the door!" Antos' and Yuri decided not to open the door. Knocking, coarse words and menace didn't stop. Suddenly a shot rang out. Yuri Pyatrovich did understand that "guests" would soon burst into the house-museum and that's why he decided to conceal himself on a garret. Soon after collective farm's chairman Giryn (it was he who shot) and divisional inspector Yakuchyts burst into the house through the broken off doorway. They began beating night watchman Mekhavich and demanded that he to tell them where Yuri Gill was. Besides they caused a massacre in the museum. They smashed the shades to smithereens and turned everything upside down...

Having lighted up an attic they found there intimidated in earnest Yuri Gill. They ordered him to get down. When Yuri Pyatrovich did it they knocked him down and began kicking him. Chairman of the collective farm Giryn, divisional inspector Yakuchyts and chief agronomist pulled exhausted Yuri Pyatrovich into the car. Mr. Giryn drove the car. Divisional inspector Yakuchyts and chief agronomist were sitting on both sides of Yuri Gill behind. While riding they threw a rope on Yuri Gill's neck and began suffocating him. One has to say that nobody knows what would happen

if the rope didn't tear out. They threatened that they would take Mr. Gill to the forest where... nobody would find him there. Yuri Gill said that they would fail to do that because the night watchman knew whom and where took him.

Then these "bandits in power" decided to punish Mr. Gill according to the law of the Republic of Belarus. They brought Yuri Gill to a charge office in Dokshhhytsy (small town in Vitsebsk region) where they drew up a charge sheet accusing him of being drunkard and being rude. According to the charge sheet Mr. Gill was first who went for them. The names of the chairman of the collective farm "Chyrvony stsyag" and the chief agronomist were written as witnesses' names. So, who beat up Mr. Gill became witnesses.

Next day Mr. Gill was taken to the court. Judge Arshynava didn't take notice of severely beaten and blood-stained Mr.Gill standing in front of her. She also didn't respond to Mr. Gill's appeal asking to communicate with the Lithuania embassy, for he was a citizen of that country, and to give him a lawyer. The judge didn't notice that on the bottom of the charge sheet Yuri Gill wrote that he didn't agree with what had been written there and that he was a victim. So, Mr. Gill was given a 7-day term of administrative detention for breaking article 156 of the Administrative Code of the Republic of Belarus...

Mr. Gill's sister began defending him. She lodged a complaint and submitted it to the Dokshytsy district's prosecutor's office. She even visited a prosecutor himself. Having heard a story told by Mr. Gill's sister prosecutor ordered to take Mr.Gill to a hospital to make a medical examination. After that the prosecutor's office appealed against court's verdict and suggested reconsidering the case.

The judge was forced to set Mr. Gill free after three-day time of detention. It seemed that Mr. Gill was rehabilitated and the truth was restored, but Mr. Gill was presented neither two court verdicts nor prosecutor's appeal and even medical examination results... Everything looked as if nothing happened. Nobody from the authorities' part offered even an apology to Mr. Gill not to mention about instituting criminal proceedings against wilfulness and petty tyranny of the local authorities' representatives.

... Such events sometimes occur in the quiet Belarusan villages. And nothing is evidence of a situation to be change in the near future. Common people will feel themselves deprived of rights till the system of collective farms exists and local authorities are not elected by people but assigned. There is one reason more everything depends on local "vertical": local courts, prosecutor's offices, and the militia and vice versa...

Undoubtedly, such occurrences will endlessly recur until reforms of the local self-ruling are not introduced. Unfortunately one has to admit that no reforms are possible in Belarus until Alexander Lukashenka is in power.

Valyantsin STEFANOVICH

Trade unions leave 'The underground'...

The fact that for the first time since 1991 trade unions organised a protest action is a distinctive feature of the protest that took place in Minsk on Bangalor Square on the 30th of September.

The Belarusan trade unions federation claimed that there would be around 50.000 people taking part in the protest action. Around 15.000 people actually came, but it is not the quantity that counts. Everyone knows that the authorities know how to keep simple workers in fear. Before the action the authorities had meetings with the potential participants of the action, during which they were explained what is good and what is bad from the point of view of the government. Major Minsk factories such as MAZ and Motor Works announced this day to be a day off. The participants of the action gathered in the different parts of the city and then in columns went to the Bangalor Square. On the way to the square they met temptations, such as cheap vodka that was sold in the shops on the way, the vodka that had dissapeared from the shops a long time ago, put there by the authorities.

Unlike the last year, this year protest against poverty did take place. We want to remind the readers that authoroties managed to make the unions cancel the action planned on the 2nd of December. The promises the president made at that time are still not fulfilled. As well as the request to the workers not to strike until the 1st of October that was made by the president this spring. He said that it would be possible to avoid negative tendencies of our economy till the 1st of October...

That is why the action was planned on the 30th of September. The date appointed by the president had nearly come and life had become even worse, almost unbearable. Moreover the president used the time to put bigger pressure on the workers. His decree number 29 (about the increase of the work discipline) is a sign of it. The decree number 29 raises lots of questions among the workers. The leader of the trade unions Uladzimir Gancharyk said during the meeting that more than 300.000 people signed the petition to the president asking him to cancel his decree...

The unions' bureaucrats became the opposition of the president for the first time of his five years of presidency. By this they reached several aims. First of all they showed the president their power, as this time the president refused to negotiate with the unions and called the leaders of the unions "drunkers who live on the expense of the workers". Secondly they increased their influence on the workers who are not satisfied with their lives. They want to take the initiative from the free trade unions. Time will tell whether they will manage to do this.

"Flees" are on strike

A.Lukashenka called the most active part of the Belorusan society, businessmen and small enterpreneurs, "flees". This word shows all the hatred he has to people who want to live in wealth and happiness. They do not only want to live well, they actually do something to have a better life...

Some decisions and decrees of the president that made the work of the entrepreneurs in Belarus impossible depict this hatred. According to decree number 14 that was adopted on the 1st of September all goods sold by the entrepreneur can be confiscated without official permission from the prosecution if the entrepreneur does not have a certificate for all the goods he sells, or if he has no documents showing where he got his currency. It is impossible to buy currency in the Belarusan banks and to receive a certificate on goods one should spend one month in the offices of different bureaucrats.

This was the reason for the strike of the markets all over Belarus that took place on the 1st of September. The strike would not end unless Lukashenka would cancel or change his decrees. On the 6th of September 73% of Belarussian markets took part in the strike.

Unfortunately the leaders of the entrepreneurs unions of different towns couldn't find the common language and co-ordinate their actions. It was impossible to organise mass protest that would cover the entire country. After the 10th of September most of the entrepreneurs of Minsk markets started to work again. The longest protest was in Grodna, till the 1st of October...

The leaders of the entrepreneurs' movement say that they didn't give up the idea of pushing the president to cancel the discriminating decrees. The one-day strike of the Belarussian markets that took place at the beginning of October is a good sign of this. It is evident that in order to achieve their aims the entrepreneurs must unite.

Events Facts Comments

(continued from p.1)

On 30 September, local organisations of trade unions held a meeting of protest, in Lenin Square, Vitsebsk City, against bad working and getting worse living conditions in Belarus. Ivan Marozaw, a secretary of Vitsebsk Council of the Belarusan Popular Front «Adradzhennie», wanted to raise a national white-red-white flag that is registered in accordance with set form but militiamen forbade to do it.

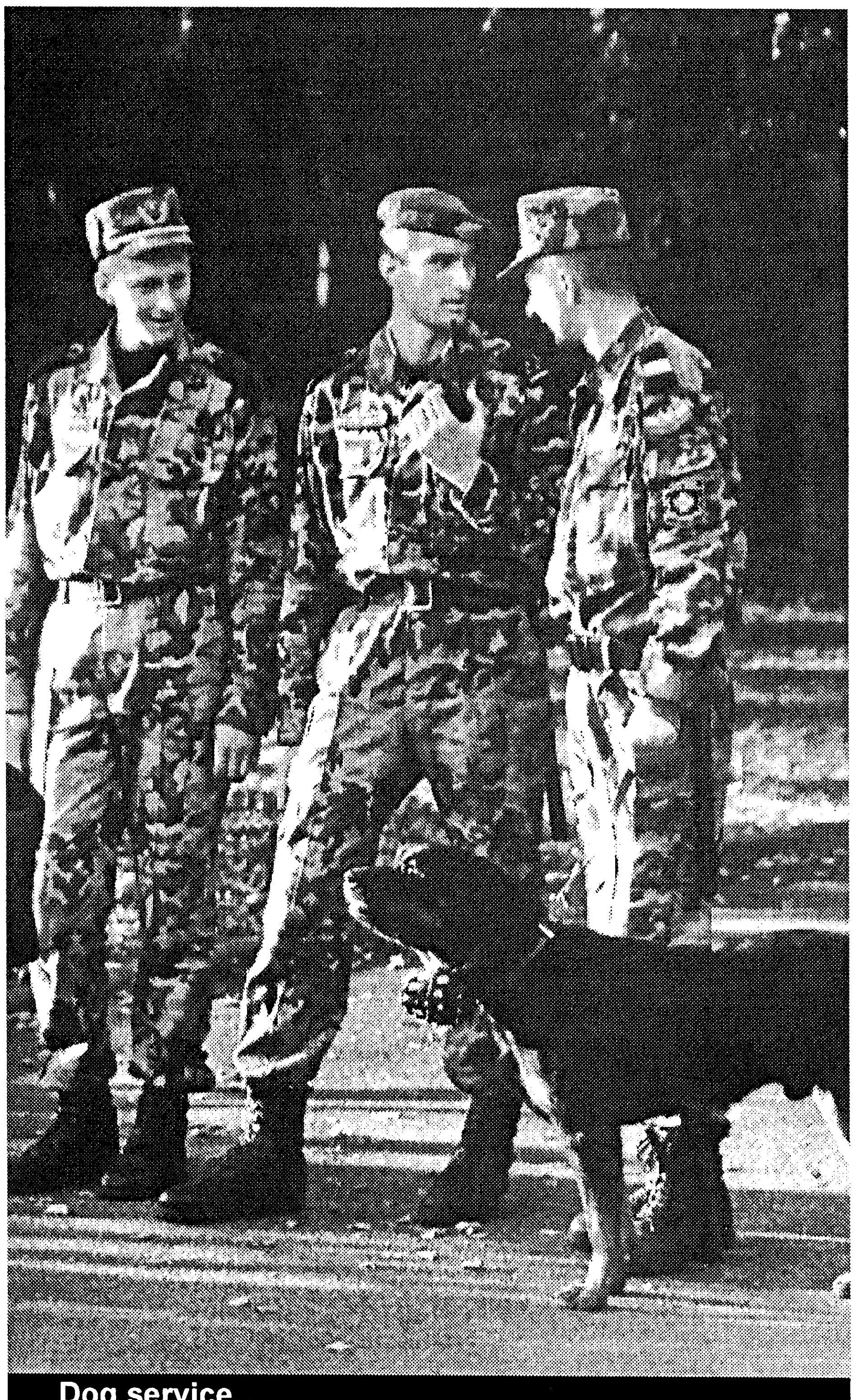
Unknown people in civilian clothes detained Mikola Yarash, teacher of the Belarusan language in a secondary school No 40 of Vitsebsk City. The reason was as usual funny: he had on his head a white-red-white band which is considered to be national and that is why dangerous for Belarusan authorities. The observers of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» demanded people in civilian clothes to carry out the detention in prescribed manner. It means introduce them, to produce papers and then explain the reason of detention. Colonel Klyatsko, militiaman in uniform, who turned out to be a chief of Kastrychnitski Administration of Internal Affairs, said that those people in civilian were obeying his order, as they were his subordinates. He explained that they detained Mikola Yarash to clear up his personality. Militiamen in civilian were forced to produce papers. Observers of «Viasna-96» required they clear up Mikola Yarash's personality straight there in the square by asking M.Yarash's colleagues. Thanks to «Viasna-96» observers Mikola Yarash was released. Head of local branch of «Viasna-96» lodged a complaint about illegal actions of militiamen and submitted it to the prosecutor's office of Kastrychnitski district of the city of Vitsebsk.

On 30 September, Uladzimir Pleshchanka, chairman of Vitsebsk Council of the Belarusan Popular Front, was detained after organised by the independent trade unions meeting. He was detained as though for spreading the newspaper «Nash President» (our president) one issue of which was found by him. During the meeting this newspaper was spread out among meeting participants by unknown person.

On 30 September, local organisations of trade unions organised a meeting on the football stadium «Budaunik» in Brest. Militiamen tried to confiscate from U.Vyalichkin, chairman of local branch of «Viasna-96», the issues of the bulletin «Myazha». Meeting participants came to the aid of U.Vyalichkin hardly militiamen had torn out the parcel with the bulletins. Militiamen withdrew and the issues of the bulletin «Myazha» were taken in some minutes.

In September, Mikhail Chygir, former Prime Minister and former candidate for the presidential office, was presented a new variant of indictment. Series of accusations, which were stated by A.Lukashenka during his appearances on Belarusan TV and radio, are missing there. For example, the inquiry tried first to charge M.Chygir with large-scale embezzlement but now it found him not guilty of it. And now they accuse M.Chygir of his ill attitude to his duties while he was a Prime Minister. But they still charge M.Chygir with power abuse. Yulia Chygir - a wife of Mikhail Chygir - believes that the case will be ready for court hearings in a month time. Although the inquiry removed serious accusations M.Chygir was not released and his term of detention prolonged up to one month.

On 4 October, Zmitser Abadowski - a son of human rights activist Syargei Abadowski from Magilew - went on hunger strike. Younger Abadowski is charged with rape though there are no grounds for it. Moreover, a «victim» herself during identification pointed at a different man. Abadowski-father considers this accusation an attempt to punish him for active participation in political life and his human rights activities. Syargei Abadowski was not allowed to be a barrister of his son on the trial. Zmitser Abadowski left without legal assistance and barrister's services refused to answer any questions and went on hunger strike... By the way, it was already the second attempt of Magilew law enforcement personnel to influence well-known human rights activist through his sons. Year ago another son of Syargey Abadowski - Ivan - was arrested. Ivan was an active member of «Malady Front». Facing threat of punishment Ivan Abadowski was forced to ask for political asylum in Poland. And he escaped persecution and got political asylum.



Dog service...
(Militia patrol conveys demonstration)

On 4 October, about ten militiamen in uniform and those in civilian from Central Administration of Internal Affairs burst into the headquarters of the Human Rights Centre «Viasna-96» based on Kisyalova St. in Minsk. There were the parents of children who died on 30 May at Nyamiga metro station at this time in location of «Viasna-96». They came to meet with journalists who prepare a book about tragic events on Nyamiga River. Militia officers took passport data of all people who were at that time in the office and journalists' explanations. The examination of the location with «elements» of search without search warrant lasted from 18.00 to 22.00. As a result they confiscated two computers, two printers, a modem and all the issues of the bulletin «The Right to Freedom» they could found. It should be pointed out that a part of confiscated equipment belongs to the USA (it was rented).

In October, Amnesty International stated its intention to give some opposition politicians a status of prisoner of conscience if they would be accused for breaking corresponding articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Belarus. It is connected, first of all, with the policy of threat run by the Belarusan authorities towards any independent initiative. In this connection Amnesty International is ready to give Aleg Vouchak, Iryna Halip, Mikalai Statkevich and Yawgen Asinski a status of political prisoner if the Belarusan justice would find them guilty.

On 7 October, a stranger in civilian clothes came up to Syargei Antonchyk, chairman of the republican striking committee, and introduced himself. He produced his papers and it turned out that he was a KGB official (Com-

mittee for the State Security). KCB representative suggested to hide Syargei Antonchyk's older son for «two-three week time», for his involvement in drug trafficking. S.Antonchyk's son is 21 year old. He works as an engineer at a plant «Etalon». Syargei Antonchyk refuted the KGB version of his son's connections with drug traffickers.

On 8 October, the Minsk City Executive Committee headed by Uladzimir Yarmoshyn considered a claim for conducting a Freedom March on 17 October. It was planned to start marching from the Yakub Kolas Square along the Frantsishak Skaryna Avenue in direction of the Independence Square. The sitting of Minsk City Executive Committee was held with participation of the organisers of the aforementioned march including prosecutor Mikalai Kupriyanaw and the city militia leadership. The organisers were told that on 16-17 October there was planned holding a trade fair as well as repairing works of a bridge near the Independence Square. That is why they authorised to hold a meeting solely in Bangalor Square. Organisers insisted on conducting Freedom March from Yakub Kolas Square to Independence one but their arguments were rejected.

On 4 October, Mikalai Statkevich, chairman of the Belarusan Social-Democratic party, (Narodnaya Gramada) found out that he might be punished for one and the same «crime» once more. The point is that investigator Koranew who was pleading the cause of Mikalai Statkevich instituted against him for participation in the meeting devoted to the Independence Day on 27 July appealed against court resolution (according to it M.Statkevich was sentenced to 10 day-term of detention). Mr.Koranew considered it to be poor. Thus Mikalai Statkevich might be sentenced again for the same «crime». Commenting on this situation M.Statkevich said that the authorities tried to intimidate him and prevent him from participation in Freedom March which was scheduled on 17 October.

On 5 October, the State Committee on Press directed to chief editors of the state-run publications the new prices of subscription for the first quarter of the year 2000. An average price of these editions taking into account an inflation rate shocked the chief editors. Thus, one issue of the magazine "Mastatstva" (art) is supposedly to cost 2 million roubles ($ 4). It should be mentioned that an average salary of culture officers who usually take subscription for this magazine in Belarus is 10-15 million roubles ($ 20-30)... According to journalists this step of the State Committee on Press is explained by its intention to get rid of the publications subsided by the state because nobody will afford to subscribe to such editions. It should be pointed out that among editions subsided by the state are mainly those published in the Belarusan language. That's why they are first to be closed. Other subsided by the state editions such as presidential newspaper "Sovetskaya Byelorussia" or "Narodnaya Gazeta", "Belarusakaya Niva" and others are for a long time the cheapest in Belarus. And prices for these papers don't seem to be considerably raised up. And they will scarcely be deprived of the state ensuring.



In October, a trial over Vasil Lyavonaw, former Minister of Agriculture went on. V.Lyavonaw's case is one of few trials where the witnesses for the persecution spoke for convicted person. Although witnesses for the persecution (former colleagues of V.Lyavonaw) pointed out that testimonies given by them might negatively reflect on their future they did give Vasil Lyavonaw the best references.

On 8 October, a draft treaty about Belarus and Russia's unification was published in Belarus. First, it was planned to publish this draft treaty on 1 October but A.Lukashenka appeared on Belarusan TV and called offered by the Russian Federation draft treaty "butt"... But one-week later draft treaty was published without changes... By the way it was done only in the Russian language. By this the authorities broke the law about languages. In a week-time the state authorities came to their senses and published it.

On 8 October, Gary Paganyaila, Andrei Klimaw's barrister petitioned for discharging his client from custody. But Minsk's Leninski district court declined it. Having done this Judge Vera Tupick said that A.Klimaw, the deputy of the 13th Supreme Soviet, is being charged with committing a serious crime. And latter excuses A.Klimaw's being in custody before trial.

On 9 October, during a football match Belarus-Italy militiamen beat and detained about 30 young girls and boys who came to support national football team with white-red-white flags on the stadium «Dinamo».

On 12 October, more than twenty students of Grodna State University named after Yanka Kupala representing different departments as well as years of studies tore out their membership cards during a meeting of official student trade union held to hear reports and elect new officials. The action took place before eyes of hundreds of meeting delegates and the leadership of the University. Participants of this action read out an appeal to the students of Grodna State University, spread out a newspaper with typically student name: «Let's revolt!» and invited young girls and boys to join an independent student trade union which was created one year ago.

On 12 October, first deputy head of the Foreign Ministry and head of country's militia Mikhail Udovick met with representatives of the Belarusan and foreign mass media. M.Udovikaw in addition to what was said during this press conference stated, «In the near future you will learn interesting peculiarities connected with Viktar Ganchar and Krasowski's disappearance. I can't say anything more. Wait!» So, we are waiting...

In October, representatives of public investigation commission on Yury Zakharanka's disappearance (ex-Minister of Defence) Uladzimir Arystaw, co-ordinator of the League of Belarus' militia officers, and Aleg Vouchyk, former investigator of the prosecutor's office, met with Svyatlana Baikova, investigator of the city prosecutor's office who is pleading a criminal case instituted after Yu.Zakharanka's disappearance. As a result, they came to a conclusion about possible interaction.

On 14 October, Mikalai Statkevich, chairman of the Social-Democratic Party "Narodnaya Gramada", in his interview to the newspaper "Narodnaya Volya" based the necessity of conducting Freedom March in the following way, "In the end, we are addressing Belarusan citizens. Let's gather together and see how much of us are here – those who are not afraid and are ready to struggle? If there are thousands of us it will be a good occasion for the authorities, first of all, to reflect properly over everything."

In October, re-registration of political parties and non-governmental organisations actually came up to an end. Two political parties and 211 non-governmental organisations didn't pass through it. Among them were the Party of Common Sense and Christian Democratic Party as well as the Association of Young Politicians, which is one of biggest and well-known non-governmental organisation in the country headed by Anatol Lyabedzka.

Informational department of "Viasna-96"

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MIKHAIL KUKABAKA

DRAFT PAINTING FROM LIFE

FROM THE HISTORY OF THE NEVER WRITTEN STORY.

They say that in Stalin camps there were people who died and still praised the villain. Such people could be found in the Soviet camps of the later period. It is very easy to bring up a person in the condition of prisons and absence of objective information. It is very easy to make him believe in anything. The process of such bringing-up might be very painful, but still people find cure for this. Step by step they free themselves from the stereotypes of thinking that were implanted in them. Sometimes it happens in a funny way.

Facing reality that violates ones principles, one exhibits the miracles of ingenuity to find ways of living in this reality without loosing his principles. This I wanted to show in my story.

Almost everything in this story is real. Real people, real events and even real assessments of the characters. Everyone described in this story can recognise himself. Only the nicknames are changed. They were not used in the camp.

We all were very different people. I think there were deeper ideological and spiritual differences between us than between prisoners of non-political camps.

We were different in education, culture etc. It was very difficult to be together on the same territory. We were people, not angels. The situation was even more complicated because of the activity of KGB. KGB tried to destroy the personalities of the prisoners completely. Quite often they succeeded. They used all means: bribe, blackmail, torture and, if necessary, even murder. They could keep a person in the camps till death. They had no need to hurry. Parents were retired; their sons took over. This is why the archives are not open to the people. I also had this feeling of hopelessness. I was arrested in 1978 and received three sentences. They wanted to give me one more sentence which meant that I had to be in prison till the year 2000. It would be the end...

30th of September 1990

Mikhail Kukabaka

I came from 'headquarters" very irritated and I started confessing immediately as I entered the room.

— What is happening! I tried to send a letter three times last week. In the first letter I mentioned what can be send in a parcel, they confiscated it. I ask why, they answer that I am indicating things that can't be indicated. I write another letter. I didn' t put a word about parcel. Just two lines: "hello" on top and "goodbye" at the end, then signature and date, nothing else. Again confiscated. They said I put coded information. But what is coded, they do not explain. Today they confiscated the third letter. It was a clean sheet of paper, just date and my signature on it. And what do you think they say? They say it has suspicious contents and confiscated it. I proposed them to write the letter themselves and I can sign it. They refuse. They refuse, as it is not their job to write letters. This is real humiliation!

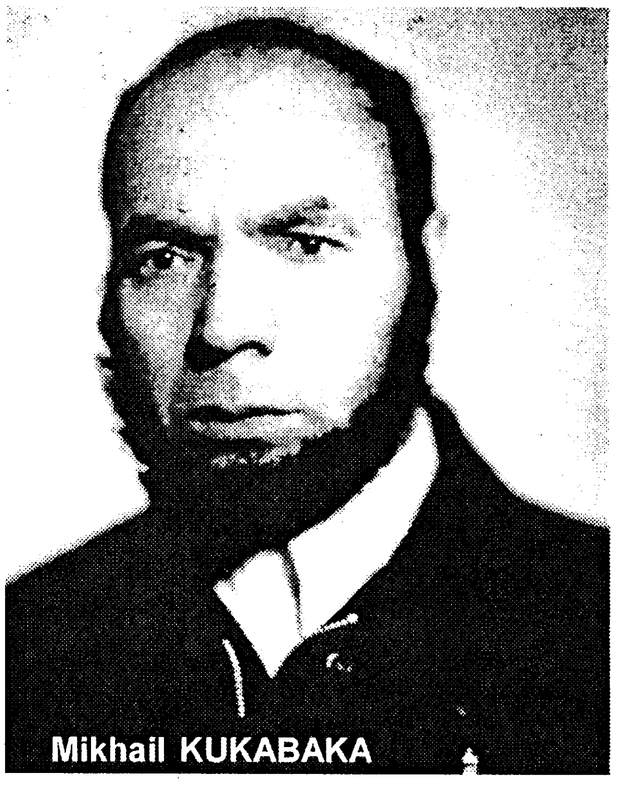
— Well, he has not understood that he is living under the ancient Egyptian slavery, — I heard the cold voice coming from the corner. That was Filolog, the doctor in filology who was eating a biscuit and was looking at me.

"Well! Say more! I think ancient Egypt pharaoh's wouldn't allow you to eat biscuits," I argued with Filolog in my thoughts but I did not say a thing.

— And what did you expect from this communists!? — shouted Engineer from another corner.

Spy stopped reading his detective story, looked at me with irony in his eyes and without saying a word started reading again.

It should be mentioned that Spy was very real. He worked as a constructor and as a part-time spy. Maybe he was working as a spy and as a part-time constructor, but it wasn't important anymore. That was successfully


Mikhail KUKABAKA

proved by an investigation. Spy was so sure that he could not be uncovered that he lost a very important document and, of course, the document was found by the KGB-agent. Spy was directed to the Perm region to read detective stories. For ten years.

All of a sudden Marxist came to me and said, looking at everyone else in the cell with contempt:

— Why do you blame the communists for everything? I can't believe the enemy propaganda had such an effect on you that you can't see the forest through the trees.

— And whom should I blame? Did the French put me in this camp? And forget about the enemy propaganda. It is not worth the risk to listen to it. They jam broadcasts so well that you'll loose thousands of nerves before you understand what they are talking about. And nerves can' t be restored, — I showed my outlook.

— It is very good that you are not under the influence of foreign propaganda, it is possible to talk with you. Please, tell sincerely, did it ever occur to you that CIA is to blame for all your misfortune?

— What! Are you crazy, did you loose your mind because of Marx, — I shouted back.

(To be continued)

This article is a letter from the past. From the Soviet past that was almost unknown to us pioneers and sometimes-even communists. Maybe we heard about dissidents, about fighters against communist regime, prisoners of conscious, but we didn' t know who these people were and how they lived behind the polar circle. "Right on freedom" has published the memories of political prisoners of our time. They were convicted according to the criminal codex and they were kept in prison with criminals. In the Soviet times there were special camps for political prisoners. We find the memories of Michail Kukabaka about old times very interesting. A. Lukashenka wants to restore the country of the Breznjev times, when Kukabaka was imprisoned. The parallels between the past and the present are very obvious.

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